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# THE BRIG OF AYR



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THE BRIG OF AYR







VIEW OF THE NEW BRIDGE AND TOLBOOTH



To the Marchioness of Adair  
for the Author. 4. III. 26

THE BRIG OF AYR  
AND SOMETHING OF  
ITS STORY ❧ ❧ ❧ By  
JAMES A. MORRIS

*SEVENTH EDITION*

AYR : STEPHEN & POLLOCK

1912



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# I L L U S T R A T I O N S

*VIEW OF THE NEW BRIDGE AND TOLBOOTH*

*frontispiece*

*REPRINT OF HAND-BILL, DATED 1792*

*to face page eighteen*

*"THE TWA BRIGS" IN MARCH 1878*

*to face page twenty-three*

*"THE TWA BRIGS" IN THE LATE SIXTIES*

*to face page twenty-four*

*VIEW OF AYR IN 1693*

*to face page thirty-three*

*"THE TWA BRIGS" IN 1841*

*to face page thirty-six*

*THE AULD BRIG IN THE EARLY SIXTIES*

*to face page forty-three*

*THE AULD BRIG FROM THE NORTH-EAST AFTER  
PRESERVATIVE OPERATIONS*

*to face page sixty-six*

# I L L U S T R A T I O N S

*THE HEART OF THE BRIG, SHOWING THE CON-  
CRETE SHAFT-HEAD AND CENTRAL SPAN-  
DREL WALL*

*to face page sixty-nine*

*THE BRIG ROADWAY AFTER PRESERVATIVE  
OPERATIONS*

*to face page seventy-five*

## P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

**T**HE poem, "The Brigs of Ayr," was written in 1786, and inscribed to the Poet's good friend, Mr John Ballantine, banker, Ayr. He it was who generously offered to advance the sum, happily not required, for the production of the Second Edition, published in Edinburgh in 1787, which, following by a year the Kilmarnock Edition, contained twenty-two pieces additional thereto, one of them "The Brigs of Ayr." To Mr Ballantine, Burns addressed several letters from Edinburgh, informing him of his reception by the world of birth, letters, and good fellowship; and, as indicative throughout all his triumphs and later troubles of how warm a place Ayr held in his heart, let the following letter establish:—

*March 1791.*

"While here I sit, sad and solitary, by the side of a fire in a little country inn, and drying my wet clothes, in pops a poor fellow of a sodger, and tells me he is going to Ayr. By heavens! say I to myself, with a tide of good spirits which the magic of that sound, Auld Toon o' Ayr, conjured up, I will send my last song to Mr Ballantine. Here it is:—

## P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

“Ye flowery banks o’ bonnie Doon,  
How can ye blume sae fair !  
How can ye chant, ye little birds,  
And I sae fu’ o’ care !

Thou’ll break my heart, thou bonnie bird,  
That sings upon the bough ;  
Thou minds me o’ the happy days  
When my fause luv was true.

Thou’ll break my heart, thou bonnie bird,  
That sings beside thy mate ;  
For sae I sat, and sae I sang,  
And wist na o’ my fate.

Aft hae I rov’d by bonnie Doon,  
To see the woodbine twine,  
And ilka bird sang o’ its love,  
And sae did I o’ mine.

Wi’ lightsome heart I pu’d a rose  
Frae aff its thorny tree,  
And my fause luv staw the rose,  
But left the thorn wi’ me.”

The second version of the song, one of the most beautiful lyrics ever written, is here given in the form in which it was sent to Mr Ballantine, and not the altered and later version now in general use.

The New Bridge, designed by Mr Robert Adams, and built during the Provostship of Mr Ballantine, was practically finished in



## P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

1789; but on what I am told was the middle baluster of the range above the midmost arch, on the west and untouched side, is the date 1785, and this baluster is in the possession of the heirs of the late Mr John Miller, Fort Castle, Ayr, to whom much of the dressed stonework of the Brig found its way during the period of its demolition. The four valuable cast-lead figures from the Bridge were at first secured by private individuals, but they are now and more fittingly in the gardens of Alloway Cottage and Burns' Monument, two in each; Ceres and Bacchus disporting themselves on the cottage lawn, while Pan and Marsyas, having found for themselves secluded bowers by the riverside, tune their pipes to its music.

In the Town Council minutes of the time, there is a series of interesting references to the building of this bridge. The Committee of the Council charged with the conduct of the work was, on the 24th February 1786, instructed to sign the contract "with Alexander Stevens, mason in Prestonhall"; and at the monthly meeting on the 3rd May of the same year, it was reported that the contract had been duly signed. On the 21st January 1789, there is the entry that the

## P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

bridge “ was finished ” ; instructions were given to have it inspected, and, if found satisfactory, taken over from the contractor. This was done, and on the 3rd March 1790 the accounts, amounting in all to £4063, 2s., were reported settled. The poem was written probably between the publication of the Kilmarnock Edition, on the 31st July 1786, and certainly prior to the 7th or 8th of October of the same year; and the foregoing notes from the Burgh minutes are of interest, because they give the authoritative dates of the beginning and close of the building operations. Between the 31st May, when it was reported to the Council that the contract had been signed, and the early days of October—the period of Burns’ letter to Aiken—very little even of the “ rising piers ” could have been visible, and the “ braw new coat ” then existed only on the contract drawings, or in the poet’s imagination ; even the arches had not yet been “ streeket ower frae bank tae bank.” It was long a tradition among the older generation of Ayr masons—indeed I have heard it repeated by a descendant if not of Alexander Stevens himself, then of one who had a prominent share in the work—that the foundations were, at the time of building,

## P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

considered unsatisfactory. Whether, however, this applied to the actual foundations, or to the strata upon which they were placed, I was not able to ascertain.

Burns' emphatic prediction,

"Then down ye'll hurl, deil nor ye never rise !  
And dash the gumlie jaups up to the pouring  
skies."

may, therefore, possibly have been based on something more than prescience.

In 1844, four years after the opening of the railway between Glasgow and Ayr, powers were obtained from Parliament for the widening of the bridge—which had become inadequate for the increased traffic—the terminus of the railway being then on the north side of the river. This widening was carried out "on the upper side, in a line with the east side of Bridge Street, which will give an additional width of 13 feet 9 inches." Other than this excerpt from the minutes of the Council, there does not appear to be any further reference to the matter, either in the minutes of the Town Council, or in those of the Road Trustees, both of which bodies apparently had a share in the operations; nor is there seemingly any allusion to the

## P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

widening of the Bridge, or its reopening, in any of the local newspapers of the day.

The new parapet abutted against the still existing old house, probably built with the Bridge, but its characteristic oriel windows are surely an unusual reproduction in Adams work, of what would seem to suggest descent from the plaster and timber oriels of a preceding, and more indigenous style. This older view, shown in the frontispiece, is from a large painted tray in my possession; interesting also as showing the Tolbooth with its "dungeon clock" and nineteen steps, as well as something of the earlier Ayr in the Bridge neighbourhood.

The widened Bridge became dangerous in 1877, and was removed in that and in the following year, during the occupancy of the civic chair by Mr Thomas Steele; from whom I have it that early one morning the chief constable, Captain M'Donald, a decorous, douce, and usually deliberate highlandman, rushed in upon him and with upraised hands and gestures of consternation cried out, "Provost, the brig's doon the water!"

The location of "Simpson's" Tavern is established by an old hand-bill dated 5th September 1792, which is here reproduced

## P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

by the kindness of Mrs Campbell of Daldorch, who recently accompanied me to the Black Bull Inn, and identified the old house next it on the east, as the house referred to in the circular. It may therefore be reasonably assumed that Burns, whether in the body or out of the body, must have wandered across the Auld Brig, and, turning to the left at "Simpson's," taken his stand somewhere on the northern bank of the river between the Brigs, and from thence beheld his vision. Reference is also made in the Town Council minutes of the 1st July 1789 to "John Simson, Innkeeper at Bridge-end of Ayr," whose petition to be made exempt from payment of toll on the New Bridge was refused, on the ground that he kept a public stable, and that "even his own horses are let out for hire."

I have here to acknowledge with pleasure the kindness of Mr P. A. Thomson, the Town Clerk of Ayr, and my indebtedness to him for ready access afforded me at all times to the Burgh minutes and other documents.

The version of "The Brigs of Ayr," now reproduced, is taken from the volume in which it was first published; "Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. By Robert Burns.



## P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

Edinburgh: printed for the Author, and Sold by William Creech. M, DCC, LXXXVII." Lord Rosebery, however, has in his possession the MS. of another version, which I saw, and which his lordship took with him and held in his hand while he addressed the meeting at Glasgow, in aid of the Lord Provost's Fund for the preservation of the Auld Brig of Ayr.

The accompanying outline of the more salient features of the history of the preservation movement, was published prior to the reopening ceremony, as an article written for *The Glasgow Herald*, which identified itself, through Dr Wallace, the then editor, so strongly with the preservation movement; and for its reproduction, in a revised and perhaps more conveniently permanent form, I am indebted to the courtesy of Mr F. Harcourt Kitchin, the present Editor of that newspaper.

As the reopening ceremony followed the article by several days, no reference could of course therein be made to the proceedings; and the brief extracts from the speeches bearing more directly on the Brig, now added in the form of an appendix,\* have been incorporated, as also Lord Rosebery's always elo-

\* Appendix A.

## P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

quent and in this instance peculiarly reverent and touching peroration, at the request of many readers of this little book ; who, having kindly expressed a strong desire that such reference should be included, are here accommodated ; in order, as they said, that the outline record of the preservation movement should be made relatively complete, and the story carried onward, meantime at least, to the day of the reopening ceremony.

Several correspondents abroad, and long absent from Ayr, have asked if the old sundial they remember as boys has been retained ? Most gladly do I answer that it is as they knew it, unaltered and untouched. It was carefully taken down in one block together with its several supporting stones, and all in one block as carefully replaced ; so that to-day the sundial stands on the parapet, exactly as it stood when they and I first saw it—now perhaps nearly fifty years ago.

The old wrought-iron lamp, with its particularly long back stay reaching down to the steeply inclined cutwater, which so many of them recall, is also still in position ; and not a few have reverted to their foolhardy and venturesome scrambles down its slender length to the precarious foothold

## P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

afforded by the cutwater slope, in predatory incursions after the fragrant wall-flower which found roothold in the open joints between the stones. The wall-flower, alas ! a stray gooseberry bush, and all the luxurious vegetation which grew so thickly on the several cutwater slopes,—upon one of which a Brig story tells that, in the dawn of a long-ago morning, a goat was found browsing,—have been cleared away, and the picturesque covering and colour sacrificed at the shrine of preservation.

It is very pleasant to receive letters inquiring about these things, indicating as they do that grown men in far-off lands can become boys in heart again in the remembrance of the Brig. These are among the things that hold a people together, and the spirit which impelled many to clamber down the lamp stay, as also round the narrow cliff edge, now impassable, between Greenan Castle and the sea ; the same old “Daur ye do it ?” in the vernacular of the past, has doubtless carried the same men round many a tight corner and up many a stey brae, in other and later times.

JAMES A. MORRIS.

SAVOY CROFT, AYR,  
14th January 1912.



BRIDGE-END of AIR, 5 Sept. 1792.

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**H**UGH SMITH, Shoemaker, being forced by the MAGISTRATES to leave the Town of AIR, because he would not SWEAR the BURGESS OATH, has opened a SHOP in the large Room at the East end of Mr. SIMSON's Inn. He returns thanks to those who have already favoured him with their orders; solicits the continuance of their favour; and begs leave to assure them, and all others who may be pleased to employ him, that he will make it his study to serve them as well as he is able.



T H E  
B R I G S   O F   A Y R.  
A   P O E M.

*Inscribed to J. B\*\*\*\*\*, Esq; AYR.*

**T**HE simple Bard, rough at the rustic  
plough,  
Learning his tuneful trade from ev'ry  
bough ;  
The chanting linnet, or the mellow thrush,  
Hailing the setting sun, sweet, in the green thorn  
bush,  
The soaring lark, the perching red-breast shrill,  
Or deep-ton'd plovers, grey, wild-whistling o'er  
the hill ;  
Shall he, nurst in the Peasant's lowly shed,  
To hardy Independence bravely bred,  
By early Poverty to hardship steel'd,  
And train'd to arms in stern Misfortune's field,  
Shall he be guilty of their hireling crimes,  
The servile, mercenary Swiss of rhymes ?  
Or labour hard the panegyric close,  
With all the venal soul of dedicating Prose ?  
No ! though his artless strains he rudely sings,  
And throws his hand uncouthly o'er the strings,  
He glows with all the spirit of the Bard,  
Fame, honest fame, his great, his dear reward.



## THE BRIGS OF AYR

'Twas in that season ; when a simple Bard,  
Unknown and poor, simplicity's reward,  
Ae night, within the ancient brugh of *Ayr*,  
By whim inspir'd, or haply prest wi' care,  
He left his bed and took his wayward rout,  
And down by *Simpson's*\* wheel'd the left about :  
(Whether impell'd by all-directing Fate,  
To witness what I after shall narrate ;  
Or whether, rapt in meditation high,  
He wander'd out he knew not where nor why)  
The drowsy *Dungeon-clock*† had number'd two,  
And *Wallace Tow'r*† had sworn the fact was true :  
The tide-swoln Firth, with sullen-sounding roar,  
Through the still night dash'd hoarse along the  
shore :

All else was hush'd as Nature's closed e'e ;  
The silent moon shone high o'er tow'r and tree :  
The chilly Frost, beneath the silver beam,  
Crept, gently-crusting, o'er the glittering  
stream.——

When, lo ! on either hand the list'ning Bard,  
The clanging sugh of whistling wings is heard ;  
Two dusky forms dart thro' the midnight air,  
Swift as the *Gos*‡ drives on the wheeling hare ;  
Ane on th' *Auld Brig* his hairy shape uprears,  
The ither flutters o'er the *rising piers* :  
Our warlock Rhymer instantly descry'd  
The Sprites that owre the *Brigs of Ayr* preside.

\* A noted tavern at the *Auld Brig* end.

† The two steeples.

‡ The gos-hawk, or falcon.

## T H E   B R I G S   O F   A Y R

(That Bards are second-sighted is nae joke,  
And ken' the lingo of the sp'ritual folk ;  
Fays, Spunkies, Kelpies, a', they can explain them,  
And ev'n the vera deils they brawly ken them).  
*Auld Brig* appear'd of ancient Pictish race,  
The vera wrinkles Gothic in his face :  
He seem'd as he wi' Time had warstl'd lang,  
Yet, teughly doure, he bade an unco bang.  
*New Brig* was buskit in a braw, new coat,  
That he, at *Lon'on*, frae ane *Adams* got ;  
In's hand five taper staves as smooth's a bead,  
Wi' virls an' whirlygigums at the head.  
The Goth was stalking round with anxious search,  
Spying the time-worn flaws in ev'ry arch ;  
It chanc'd his new-come neebor took his e'e,  
And e'en a vex'd and angry heart had he !  
Wi' thieveless sneer to see his modish mien,  
He, down the water, gies him this guideen——

### A U L D   B R I G .

I doubt na, frien', ye'll think ye're nae sheep-  
shank,  
Ance ye were streekit owre frae bank to bank !  
But gin ye be a brig as auld as me,  
Tho' faith, that date, I doubt, ye'll never see ;  
There'll be, if that day come, I'll wad a boddle,  
Some fewer whigmeleeries in your noddle.

### N E W   B R I G .

Auld Vandal, ye but show your little mense,  
Just much aboot it wi' your scanty sense ;









## T H E   B R I G S   O F   A Y R

Will your poor, narrow foot-path of a street,  
Where twa wheel-barrows tremble when they  
meet,

Your ruin'd, formless bulk o' stane and lime,  
Compare wi' bonie *Brigs* o' modern time ?  
There's men o' taste wou'd tak the *Ducat-stream*\*,  
Tho' they should cast the vera sark and swim,  
E'er they would grate their feelings wi' the view  
Of sic an ugly, Gothic hulk as you.

### A U L D   B R I G .

Conceited gowk ! puff'd up wi' windy pride !  
This mony a year I've stood the flood an' tide ;  
And tho' wi' crazy eild I'm sair forfairn,  
I'll be a *Brig* when ye're a shapeless cairn !  
As yet ye little ken about the matter,  
But twa-three winters will inform ye better.  
When heavy, dark, continued, a'-day rains  
Wi' deepening deluges o'erflow the plains ;  
When from the hills where springs the brawling

*Coil,*

Or stately *Lugar's* mossy fountains boil,  
Or where the *Greenock* winds his moorland course,  
Or haunted *Garpal*† draws his feeble source,  
Arous'd by blustering winds and spotting thowes,  
In mony a torrent down the snaw-broo rowes ;  
While crashing ice, borne on the roaring speat,  
Sweeps dams, an' mills, an' brigs, a' to the gate ;

\* A noted ford, just above the Auld Brig.

† The banks of *Garpal Water* is one of the few places in the West of Scotland where those fancy scaring beings, known by the name of *Ghaists*, still continue pertinaciously to inhabit.

## THE BRIGS OF AYR

And from *Glenbuck*\*, down to the *Rattonkey*†,  
Auld *Ayr* is just one lengthen'd, tumbling sea ;  
Then down ye'll hurl, deil nor ye never rise !  
And dash the gumlie jaups up to the pouring  
skies.

A lesson sadly teaching, to your cost,  
That Architecture's noble art is lost !

## NEW BRIG.

Fine *architecture*, trowth, I needs must say't o't !  
The L—d be thankit that we've tint the gate o't !  
Gaunt, ghastly, ghaist-alluring edifices,  
Hanging with threat'ning jut like precipices ;  
O'er-arching, mouldy, gloom-inspiring coves,  
Supporting roofs, fantastic, stony groves :  
Windows and doors in nameless sculptures drest,  
With order, symmetry, or taste unblest ;  
Forms like some bedlam Statuary's dream,  
The craz'd creations of misguided whim ;  
Forms might be worshipp'd on the bended knee, }  
And still the *second dread command* be free, }  
Their likeness is not found on earth, in air, or  
sea. }

Mansions that would disgrace the building-taste  
Of any mason reptile, bird, or beast ;  
Fit only for a doited Monkish race,  
Or frosty maids forsworn the dear embrace,  
Or Cuifs of later times, wha held the notion,  
That sullen gloom was sterling, true devotion :

\* The source of the river of Ayr.

† A small landing-place above the large key.



THE TWA BRIGS IN THE LATE SIXTIES



## THE BRIGS OF AYR

Fancies that our guid Brugh denies protection,  
And soon may they expire, unblest with resurrection !

### AULD BRIG.

O ye, my dear-remember'd, ancient yealings,  
Were ye but here to share my wounded feelings !  
Ye worthy *Proveses*, an' mony a *Bailie*,  
Wha in the paths o' righteousness did toil ay ;  
Ye dainty *Deacons*, an' ye douce *Conveeners*,  
To whom our moderns are but causey-cleaners :  
Ye godly *Councils* wha hae blest this town ;  
Ye godly *Brethren* o' the sacred gown,  
Wha meekly gae your *hurdies* to the *smiters* ;  
And (what would now be strange) ye *godly Writers* :

A' ye douce folk I've borne aboon the broo,  
Were ye but here, what would ye say or do !  
How would your spirits groan in deep vexation,  
To see each melancholy alteration ;  
And, agonising, curse the time and place  
When ye begat the base, degen'rate race !  
Nae langer Rev'rend Men, their country's glory,  
In plain, braid Scots hold forth a plain, braid story :

Nae langer thrifty Citizens, an' douce,  
Meet owre a pint, or in the Council-house ;  
But staumrel, corky-headed, graceless Gentry,  
The herryment and ruin of the country ;  
Men, three-parts made by Taylors and by Barbers,  
Wha waste your weel-hain'd gear on d—d *new Brigs and Harbours* !

# THE BRIGS OF AYR

## NEW BRIG.

Now haud you there ! for faith ye've said enough,  
And muckle mair than ye can mak to through.  
As for your Priesthood, I shall say but little,  
*Corbies* and *Clergy* are a shot right kittle :  
But, under favor o' your langer beard,  
Abuse o' Magistrates might weel be spar'd ;  
To liken them to your auld-warld squad,  
I must needs say, comparisons are odd.  
In *Ayr*, Wag-wits nae mair can have a handle  
To mouth 'A Citizen,' a term o' scandal :  
Nae mair the Council waddles down the street,  
In all the pomp of ignorant conceit ;  
Men wha grew wise priggin owre hops an' raisins,  
Or gather'd lib'ral views in Bonds and Seisins.  
If haply Knowledge, on a random tramp,  
Had shor'd them with a glimmer of his lamp,  
And would to Common-sense for once betray'd  
them,  
Plain, dull Stupidity stept kindly in to aid them.

---

What farther clishmaclaver might be said,  
What bloody wars, if Sprites had blood to shed,  
No man can tell ; but, all before their sight,  
A fairy train appear'd in order bright :  
Adown the glittering stream they featly danc'd ;  
Bright to the moon their various dresses glanc'd :  
They footed o'er the wat'ry glass so neat,  
The infant ice scarce bent beneath their feet :



## THE BRIGS OF AYR

While arts of Minstrelsy among them rung,  
And soul-ennobling Bards heroic ditties sung.  
O had *M'Lauchlan*\*, thairm-inspiring Sage,  
Been there to hear this heavenly band engage,  
When thro' his dear *Strathspeys* they bore with  
Highland rage ;

Or when they struck old Scotia's melting airs,  
The lover's raptur'd joys or bleeding cares ;  
How would his Highland lug been nobler fir'd,  
And ev'n his matchless hand with finer touch  
inspir'd !

No guess could tell what instrument appear'd,  
But all the soul of Music's self was heard ;  
Harmonious concert rung in every part,  
While simple melody pour'd moving on the heart.

The Genius of the Stream in front appears,  
A venerable Chief advanc'd in years ;  
His hoary head with water-lilies crown'd,  
His manly leg with garter tangle bound.  
Next came the loveliest pair in all the ring,  
Sweet Female Beauty hand in hand with Spring ;  
Then, crown'd with flow'ry hay, came Rural Joy,  
And Summer, with his fervid-beaming eye :  
All-cheering Plenty, with her flowing horn,  
Led yellow Autumn wreath'd with nodding corn ;  
Then Winter's time-bleach'd locks did hoary  
show,

By Hospitality with cloudless brow.  
Next follow'd Courage with his martial stride,  
From where the *Feal* wild-woody coverts hide :

\* A well-known performer of Scottish music on the violin.

## T H E   B R I G S   O F   A Y R

Benevolence, with mild, benignant air,  
A female form, came from the tow'rs of *Stair* :  
Learning and Worth in equal measures trode,  
From simple *Catrine*, their long-lov'd abode :  
Last, white-rob'd Peace, crown'd with a hazle  
wreath,

To rustic Agriculture did bequeath  
The broken, iron instruments of Death,  
At sight of whom our Sprites forgot their kind-  
ling wrath.



# THE BRIG OF AYR

AND

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

**T**HE idea was curiously slow to formulate, and the people of Ayr were loth to believe that the frail and familiar structure which for centuries has spanned their river, was in precarious condition, and imminent danger of collapse ; but slower still, and more tardy of acceptance was the inevitable corollary, that in virtue of its poetic and historic associations, its archæological interest, the Brig was worthy of preservation. When, however, after often seeming futile effort, and much opposition, largely because of the glamour of a generous local bequest, these ideas began to prevail ; and, when at length they materialised, and emerging from the Burghal, gathered sufficient force and momentum to become national in scope and range, few, if indeed any of the efforts after a monument in honour of

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

Robert Burns, evoked an enthusiasm and response so sincere and universal, as that which had for its purpose the preservation of the Auld Brig of Ayr.

The appeal on its behalf touched deep chords in many hearts, in many lands ; for the Ayr Brig is the visible expression of much of the Poet's personality, and, with the Brig o' Doon and the "Auld Clay Biggin'," must ever remain one of the triple altars in that imperishable shrine of his worship, which, having Alloway and Ayr for its Mecca, draws towards it the feet and hearts of countless thousands from beyond even the seven seas.

The Brig is also an historic structure of note, and knew much of the bitter feuds and strenuous life of Ayrshire. Generation after generation of famous Scots of all ranks and degrees have made use of it ; English invaders have crossed its narrow back, and foreigners of many nationalities,—for Ayr in its earlier days was the seaport of the West—these all, with the honest burghers themselves and their kinsfolk, have climbed its steep approach and worn smooth its cobble-stones, as they spun the record of their separate lives. Venerable in itself, and deserving of

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

reverence for its own sake, the Brig stands the last remaining of the silent monuments of the past, still serving the town in the useful purpose of its building ; for which cause alone it is worthy of much regard, and this, even if it had never been richly dowered by the genius of Robert Burns, or hallowed by his personal association—its supremest as its most enduring glory.

Across the Brig Burns oftentimes passed, upon it he mused, from its lofty altitude, high arched above the highest tides, his eyes followed downward to the sea the then, save by it, unbridged river ; and, westward from the harbour mouth across the frith to the distant peaks of Arran, with its long low-lying island hills. If, in a beneficent universe, hills are ever called into being for beautiful ends alone, then surely these were hills reared to form a bar of purple, against those marvellous sunsets which transform the sky into a fiery furnace held in luminous bondage behind deep clouds ; the sea into a pavement of crimson and gold, iridal with opalescent colours wherein shadows hide, themselves fugitive and elusive as the glistering heart of an ocean shell, wet and radiant in its virginal beauty. These colours, in their limpid and silent

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

beauty, reached shoreward from the sea, and, carried onward by river wavelets to the Brig's feet, overspread its surface and lit up its brown stones with a reflected glory.

Eastward, into the cool land of the morning, with its flush of rose, its tones of pearl and grey, the upward river, a silver mirror, passed from sight round the wooded bends of Craigie.

Thus and truly, the divers colours of East and West have laid hold upon the Brig, and the sun has fused their tones into its masonry. The strong south-west winds have bitten hard into it, and brought up also against it the surge of the sea to break and be spent in leaping spray upon its fabric ; wearing it with the wind, to rich surface texture, each separate and time-wrought stone to round and softened edge. This all was open to men's eyes, and clear as day ; but hidden within the piers, unseen and silently in the darkness, the receding tides with wanton lips long sucked the lifeblood and almost the very vitals from its massive pillars. The river, too, quick-rising and sudden of flood, has lifted its waves against the Brig's life, and beaten viciously into it with ice and plunging tree trunk ; but hardest and most







*Prospetus Civitatis AERE ab Orientale. The Prospect of the Town of Acre from the East.*

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

unnatural of all, man's ingratitude turned oftentimes lightly from it

"As friend remember'd not."

and once and again, with simulated or real forgetfulness, perchance by poverty of gear or of mind, the Brig has been left to stand or fall, as might betide.

Slezer's view,\* dated 1693, and the earliest pictorial record existing, shows the river on the Ayr side seaward of the Brig, with houses and small back lands to the water's edge, and, nearer the sea, infrequent and decaying walls of harbour masonry; while at the river's mouth and along the northern bank are undulating links and sand-dunes of wide extent, of which Burns' lines depictive of the earliest Ayr are literally as poetically true:

"Low, in a sandy valley spread,  
An ancient BOROUGH rear'd her head;"

Eastwards of the Brig, but close to it, were in Burns' day many of the fair gardens, for which Ayr early had a name; those on the southmost bank stretching in orchard and sward, in blossom and flower, from the clear waters' brink upward to the line of

\* *Theatrum Scotiae*.

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

old houses bordering High Street and the Mill Vennel, the last named reminiscent of Abbey precincts and appurtenances. In the midst of the gardens the Auld Kirk of the Covenant, the successor of those of other faiths and days, then held restrictive spiritual oversight upon the town ; its shadeless burial-ground, not so many years before made unlovely by the parsimonious destruction of its trees, cut down to form centring for the rebuilding of the Brig's fallen northmost arch. And there, too, in earlier days still, centuries ago from now, had been built in faith, and in the free beauty and meaning of the Gothic vernacular, the neighbouring Monasteries of the Black and Grey Friars ; both in aftertime anger and bitterness of spirit, to be razed to the very ground ; none the less their gardens and burying-places, as their churches, remain the progenitors of those of to-day, so surely does the past mould the present, and inexorably guide its trend. These things, the Brig saw and knew, as those others it has outlived.

But all that is of the past, and belongs to far-away years ; and now, it is difficult enough to realise the river of even Burns' time in the quay-bordered and railway-ridden banks, or



## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

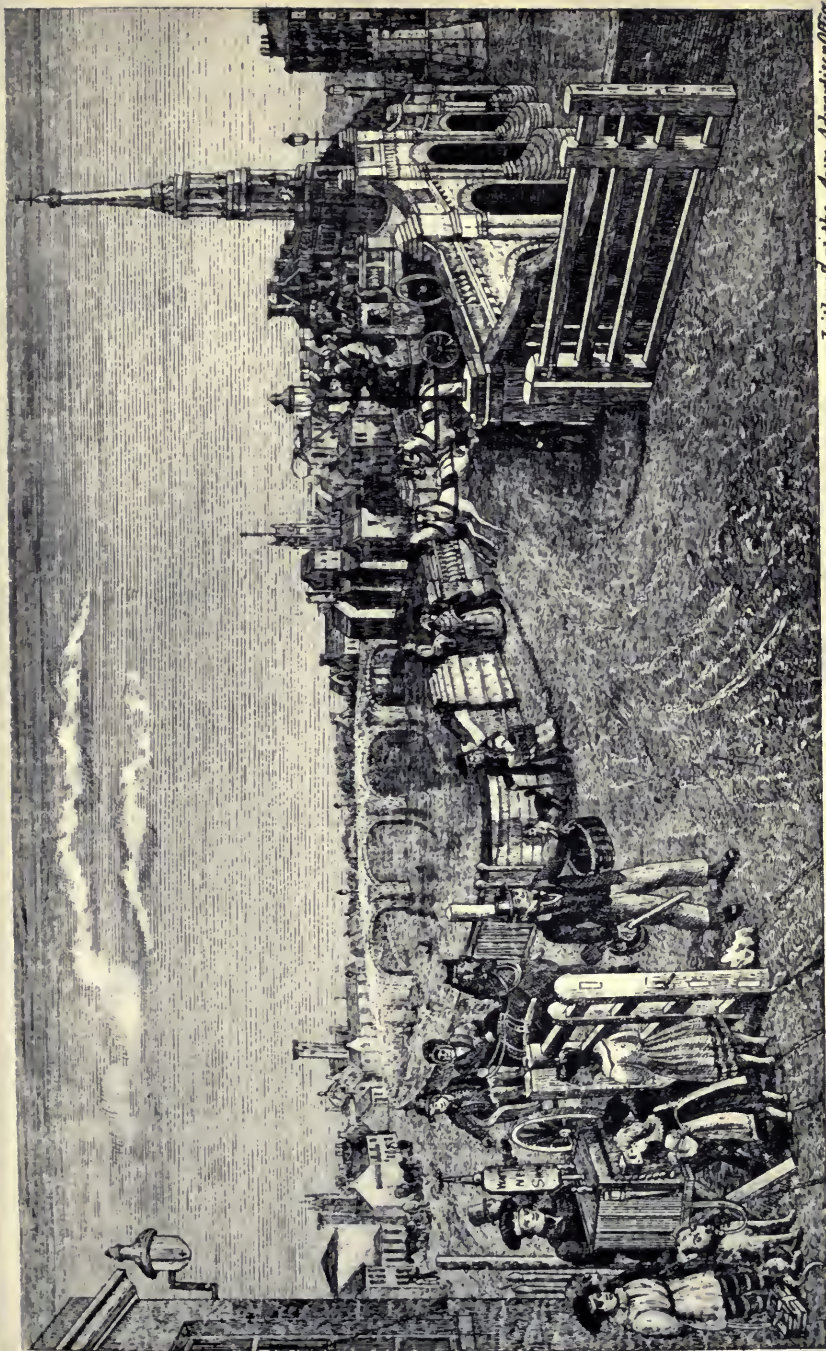
the town, in the electric-power tramway-saddled streets of our creating. The High Street that in his day Robert Burns knew, with its projecting gables and outside stairs, lissomed with easy grace and not too rigid boundaries downward from the Fauldbacks, till midway at the Wallace Tower there debouched upon it the Mill and Foul Vennels ; then passing in close succession the Meal Market, the Kirk Port, the then lately formed New Market Street dividing the one-time stance of the ancient Tolbooth, the strident and virago-tongued Fish Market at the Auld Brig end, it bore to the left, and its sinuous length drew on to the Sandgate and later Tolbooth, with its "Dungeon Clock" and memorable nineteen steps. At the junction of these two streets, stood the old Mercat Cross of Charles the Second's time, in the waning glory of once beautiful masonry ; but its tall slender stone shaft was even then surmounted by its carven capital with thistle and rose, harp and fleur de lis, superimposed upon which and crowning all, was the copper unicorn with its staff and banneret.

These all Burns knew ; but the earlier Mercat Cross, the two Tolbooths, the Castle, the Church of St John, the Monasteries,

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

the four Ports, the Town Wells and the Brig, now alone remaining, held the history of the town. The picturesque many storied and gabled houses, still rose in their place, along, and behind the streets; but, save for the uncertain river fords at the vennel and close ends, the Auld Brig alone joined the keenly jealous friendships and rivalries, of the Old and New Towns. The beautiful Adams Bridge came in Burns' own day; he saw its building, and, by prophetic instinct—some say from more prosaic data—foretold its doom; but how perilously near that doom came in later years to the Auld Brig itself, through the agency of the well-intentioned Templeton bequest, few, if indeed any, will ever fully know. The Brig came, it is said, by bequest, and by a bequest some strove frankly and strenuously, that it should go.

In a High Street shop, not far removed from the Brig end, Robert Templeton carried on a watch-maker's and jeweller's business. Shortly before his death in February 1879, he made a holograph will devising, subject only to certain life interests, his whole estate, in value about £10,000, "to the Provost and Town Council in trust in order that their successors in office may use



AYR, FROM THE NORTH

*Lithog. at the Ayr-Advertiser-Office*





## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

the whole thereof in rebuilding the Old Bridge of Ayr when such a thing may be required." Ayr, of late decades, has been offered few bequests, and its strong and insistent desire to secure the money, and with it build an entirely new bridge, is conceivable upon utilitarian grounds alone. Admitting the undoubted weight of Lord Low's opinion, that the money could only be used for rebuilding in the generally understood meaning of the word, that opinion did not, I feel sure, express or interpret the intention of the testator ; for Robert Templeton was a man with the soul of an antiquary, and none such would make provision for deliberate and vandal destruction ; least of all, by an ambiguous holograph will. The testator often showed me old silver plate and coins, which, in his business, he long treasured and sold with regret ; moreover, the delight and care with which he handled them, was that of a man who revered and loved old things. The bequest so generously conceived was fated, if not to be brought stillborn into the world, at least to be well-nigh strangled by the midwifery of law ; and in its portentous existence, the money bequeathed, not, I am convinced,

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

for the destruction, but for the preservation of the Brig, became for a time the Brig's own direst peril and most imminent danger, and this, not even excepting its own often precarious structural exigencies.

Throughout the centuries, the Brig has time and again been in deep straits, at grave hazard, and in serious disrepair.

“Wi’ crazy eild I’m sair forfairn,”

is Burns’ pregnant descriptive line ; and the Burgh records contain abundant testimony to its frequent damage and repair, even if such were not more surely evidenced by the fabric itself. Much money and effort, have time and again been expended upon it without seeming avail, perhaps, because of the quick-rising and sudden spates, of ice, of tides, or because of harbour dredging and consequent increasing river scour incidental to the work of our own day ; but, whatever the cause of its frequent exigencies, it has been left to the Scottish people of this generation to tender that outburst of fervour, which, setting aside all controversy over the bequest, because recognising the final danger and imperative need, became

“Man to man, the warld o’er,”

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

and, hearing the call of Kinship which makes a people instinctively one, a call which Burns of all men could supremely voice, they joined hand and heart and laid their ample tribute for the preservation of his Brig upon the Brig itself, the Poet's noblest material shrine.

The reputed founding of the Brig of Ayr \* by the beneficence of two maiden sisters, one of whom, Isobel Lowe, saw her lover perish before her eyes, in the dark waters of the often sudden and turbulent river, is a beautiful birth-song ; but legend and romance must to-day inevitably yield place to prosaic fact, and, whatever the motive and origin, the earliest authentic reference to the Brig, whether it be the Brig we know, or an earlier, is in the charter granted by Alexander II. in 1236, to the Royal Burgh of Ayr ; wherein, besides provision made for the Town and harbour, is also *ad sustentationem pontis*. The Brig is again referred to in the Burgh Charters (1440), and in those of the Black Friars (1488).

In the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, under date 17th November 1491, is this interesting reference connect-

\* Appendix B.



## THE BRIG OF AYR AND ing James IV. with the Brig and Town :

“ Item, the XVII Nouembris, to the  
massonis of the bryg off Ayre Xs ” ;

from which some have inferred that the existing Brig was then being built, just as others have assumed an earlier date of erection, and that the Brig was then undergoing serious repair. There is not, however, in the foregoing item any conclusive, and barely inferential, evidence on either side, and in the Brig itself there is little architectural detail remaining upon which to establish, although in general appearance the Brig would seem to indicate a date of erection, somewhat approximate to that of the King's visit ; and there is this, further, that much of its masonry, shows close resemblance to that of those portions of Crosraguel Abbey erected between 1480—1490, and of later date. On this 1491 pilgrimage to Whithorn, where he was on the 11th November, the young King twice passed through Ayr. On the outward journey he was ferried across the river, the entry in the accounts being :

“ Item, to Sanc Johnis Kirk, for the ferying  
of horss and men ower at the water : Vs ” ;

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

and it was upon the return journey that he gifted silver to the Brig masons ; just as on the 22nd of the same month he gave a similar gift (Xs) to the "Massonis of Paysla," who were then working at the Abbey. Because of this gift alone, none, however, would contend that the Abbey was only then being built, for all know that its foundation dates from the 12th century, and, except that other evidence regarding the building of the Ayr Brig is forthcoming, the reference to it in the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer, is too incidental to found upon absolutely.

For a period of ninety-eight years, there is seemingly no local reference to the Brig ; but in 1583 the Town Council ordained that

"na middingis nor foulzie be laid upon  
ye hie calsig passand to ye brig,"

an item to its credit, for in the 16th century towns greater than Ayr were not too fastidiously sanitary, and the deep holes and mud-pools of the uneven streets in wet weather, became in dry, but infectious dust-pits ; while the freedom with which, at all hours, the contents of utensils were emptied from windows, and the prevalence of "mid-

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

dings" at all doors, combined to produce odours not always agreeable to sensitive olfactory organs, and which were themselves moreover fruitful causes of pestilence and plague. In the same year "Johnne Masoun Masoun" was made burgess "for his labor and panis susteinit" . . . "in ye doun taking of ye new work abone ye brig port."

In 1585 the "Brig port, Carrick port, Kyle port, Sey port" were repaired against infectious persons with "Hinging yettis and leifis." This was the period of the "pest" or plague, which then and for many years devastated the country, but especially the towns; and the timely action of the magistrates would seem to have kept from Ayr the grim visitant. In the next year is a long entry anent "ye repairing and mending of ye brig port qlk is now ruinous and almaist paistlie like to decay vnless ye same be schortlie repairit." Accordingly, "David Frew and Johnne Masoun, Masounis," undertook "To big up the Brig qr ye same is presentlie fallen & to mend and repair the pilleris," receiving in return one year's "impost" on all goods specified "in zair gift," which were brought into the town by way of the Brig.





THE AULD BRIG IN THE EARLY SIXTIES

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

In 1588 the Brig must again have been in serious disrepair, for on the 10th of July James VI., after having ordained a commission to report, made gift of certain imposts to the town. The Commission "having sene and considerit the estait of the harbyr seypport and brig," and after conference with the "maist auncient and best experiencit burgessis and craftismen induellaris theirow," reported that the "said harbyr hevin and brig" and other works "is presentlie ruynous and safar decayit and fallen down that gif the samin be not remedit and helpit in tyme it sall altogidder decay." The King therefore granted that certain goods, passing into the town by the harbour or Brig, be taxed for the due upkeep thereof.

In 1592 the Town decreed that, in gratitude for certain favours and kindness done to the Town by the Regent Morton, "his Graceis armes to be vpoun ye brig vnder ye Kingis graceis armes w<sup>h</sup> ye townis."

In 1595 "ye bowis of ye brig y<sup>t</sup> ar apperend rūynous to be reparit w<sup>t</sup> all diligence becaūs ye seasonn of ye yeir now provokis ye samen" (14th April).

In 1597 the drastic order went forth that "na kynd of cartis slaidis or carries be suf-



## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

ferit to haif passage alangis ye brig" under penalty of the destruction of the same, "w<sup>t</sup> fyve pundis of valaw" as additional punishment.

King James VII. (1687), because the Burgh had difficulty in meeting its needs for the proper repair of the Brig, Church, Streets, and Harbour, granted right to levy impost on all ale or beer, and all malt brewed; also upon Spanish and French wines imported and sold in the Burgh.

To summarise, repeated entries in the Minutes of the Town Council afford an almost continuous record of alternate damages and repair, of which, the more noteworthy may be briefly instanced.

On the 5th of June 1732, when apparently hurriedly convened in Council, the Provost reported "That the North arch of the bridge fell yesternight." In none of the Minutes immediately previous is mention made of the instability of the arch; it therefore presumably fell suddenly, from, I am inclined to think, the collapse of the northward land abutment. A long and interesting record is given in the Council Minutes, of the contract for rebuilding the Arch, made with "Alexander Gray Masson in Stewarton and



## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

Thomas Anderson Masson in Ayr," the contract price being One Thousand and Nine hundred merks Scots, "the Town to furnish all materialls." The timber for the "Cume" or centring of the arch was made of trees cut from the "Kirkyeard," and the "firr timber" of the "culm" was not sold by roup, but retained for the "Jests and laying out of the Lofts in the new Steeple." The Brig, however, was still insecure, other piers showed indications of weakness, and soon afterwards the Council ordained that at low water when the river was fordable, the bar should be put up at the Porch, and no carriages allowed to cross the Brig.

In 1756 there is an entry that the pillars of the Brig are to be repaired. In 1754, that the Brig is to be repaired. In 1779 is a report on the causewaying, and in 1781 the Brig is again in need of repair. In 1782 the Town Council had the Brig fully examined, and the three old arches were reported as being insecure. Two years later a proposal was made to widen and repair the Brig, but this proposal was, in the following year, set aside in favour of a new Bridge joining the Sandgate, by way of the Water Vennel, with the Main Street of Newton,

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

on the line of the old ford ; and this Bridge the Town was in 1785 empowered by Act of Parliament to build, the Auld Brig being retained for foot traffic only.

The period from then intervening, has mainly been a record of patching and repair. Since so recently as from 1867-8 onward, the piers, always the weakest portion of the structure, have been protected, first by piling, then by encasing their foundation with concrete fenders, and lastly, in one pier, by slight underpinning. In April 1902, upon a report by the Burgh Surveyor, the Council minuted their resolve, that the piers be "instantly repaired." Mr Kennedy, the contractor for the concurrent harbour works, in a report to the Council almost immediately following that of the Surveyor, was even more frankly outspoken. In June 1903, Mr John Eaglesham, C.E., submitted a very exhaustive report, closing with the ominous warning that "this work must not be too long delayed." In September of the same year, the Surveyor reported subsidence of the hornising above the Southmost Arch through the open joints of which a foot-rule might be dropped into the river.

As the Town Council even then seemed

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

reluctant to take any action, I ventured in October to bring the matter before the representatives of the First Electoral Ward ; thereafter, by the courtesy of the Ayr press, before the Ayr public ; and, as a record of the inception and progress of the preservation movement, may some day be desirable, a brief reference to it from the Town Council minutes, and other correspondence, may not in the meantime be without interest. The campanile of St Mark's having then only recently fallen, I ventured, in my letter to the local press, after detailing recent Brig operations, to suggest a parallel. " In both structures subsidence of foundations, rents, cracks, and decay were reported and considered ; and one day the campanile collapsed—irretrievably. Here, happily, the parallel ends. Our Old Bridge has historic and poetic associations belonging not to Ayr only, or to Scotland, but to a large portion of the English-speaking world ; and it would be a matter of deep sorrow if so ancient and valuable a monument of national life should, from any cause or reason whatever, be allowed to perish."

As it is not easy for those who live in intimate communion with an historic mon-

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

ument always to realise its value, I wrote an article on it in one of the December magazines, and, in the hope of further influencing the Town from without, I wrote also to several of the Editors of the London press, and to friends who might influence them, notably Mr Thackeray Turner, Honorary Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. His Society cordially and at once took the matter up with me, and, communicating with the Town Council, their letter was published in the November report of the Council proceedings. The wider publicity thus given, was the keynote of all after efforts to preserve the Brig, it having been at once manifest that any influence, to be actively operative, must be other than local.

The Town Council was at this time undoubtedly wishful to do what it thought was right, but it was also and unfortunately for itself on the horns of a dilemma, and divided between two opinions. The validity of the will creating the bequest having been already contested by the Heirs-at-Law, the Council was very naturally anxiously cautious as to its procedure ; for, if by its action the money should be lost to

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

the Town, its members feared the displeasure of the ratepayers, and, on the other hand, the resentment of the wider public, if the Brig fell; the latter an instinctive premonition curiously accurate, for, it was by the contributions of the outside public, that the Brig was ultimately preserved to the town. To remove, if possible, the initial difficulty incidental to the bequest, I saw the agents for the Heirs-at-Law, and suggested a compromise, a course to which they were then agreeable; but the Legatees appeared disinclined to entertain the proposal, and it was not at the time carried further. Meanwhile, to make their position clear, they raised a judicial action in the Court of Session, against the Heirs-at-Law and the Judicial Factor, and, pending a decision, called in Mr Hall Blyth, C.E., to carefully examine and report upon the Brig. On the 25th February 1904, Mr Blyth telegraphed that in his opinion the Brig was unsafe, and should be closed. This was forthwith done, the three southmost arches strongly centred, the parapets barricaded, and the Brig again opened to traffic. During these operations, I was most courteously allowed to take a very exhaustive series of photographs of the Brig.



## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

In June, Lord Low decided that the money had vested in the Town Council, and—to slightly anticipate—the last beneficiary having died on the 15th December, the capital sum was paid over.

In November, during heavy and continuous river floods, several of the centring supports were washed out to sea, and it became desirable to at once write to the Town Council, pointing out the serious danger to the Brig, if repairs were longer delayed. I also wrote to Mr Thackeray Turner, stating that the river bed had been scoured away by the floods, from beneath a large portion of the south pier fender; but, while we were arranging a series of letters to the London and Provincial press, the Town Council showed indications of movement, and we decided in consequence to postpone any public action, in order that we might not in any way traverse its policy or efforts.

In February 1905, the Town Council definitely decided upon rebuilding the Brig, in terms of Lord Low's interpretation of the bequest, and Mr John Young the Burgh Surveyor, Mr Eaglesham, and myself were asked to consider and report accordingly; but, as Lord Low's interpretation of rebuilding

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

might readily involve the destruction of the Brig, the task was not without difficulty. After careful examination of the Brig itself, and exhaustive consideration, no practicable engineering scheme being apparently forthcoming, whereby the older and more essential portions of the fabric could be retained, I, having reason to understand that Sir William Arrol was sympathetically inclined toward preservation, suggested that we ask leave to consult him as a bridge-building contractor of wide experience ; for, after all, whatever engineering scheme might ultimately be accepted, it would, from the very nature of the work, rest with the contractor to meet the varying needs and difficulties, of each separate day and hour. Unfortunately, however, Sir William's opinion was that the Brig should be removed, as it was not worth preserving; and, although I pointed out, that this would involve the destruction of a fabric which we wished to conserve, he was unable to accept or apprehend its cogency. Having failed with Sir William, I then suggested to my colleagues that, as we seemed unable to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, and as my suggestion to utilise the heavy piers and work from within, was in their opinion im-



## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

practicable, we ask leave to consult an eminent engineering specialist in stone-bridge-building, and submit our difficulties to him. It was now the evening of our last meeting, and final effort. We telephoned to the interim Town Clerk, who, coming at once, agreed to submit our request to his Council, but only upon one definite and specific condition, namely, that, to end the matter once and for all, we would agree to accept the engineering decision, so to be given, as final. From this, I dissented; pointing out that the issue involved was too grave to hazard upon the decision of a possibly unsympathetic consultant, and, that we must at any cost, evolve a scheme to save the Brig, not to destroy. After much disputation, we separated near midnight, but my point had been gained; for, had the engineering decision to be given been accepted in anticipation as final, then there would not have been an Auld Brig today. In reality, it was the crisis of the struggle, and upon so frail a thread the existence of the Brig indisputably hung. Mr Hall Blyth, was the consultant appointed by the Town Council; we laid our views before him, and in his report thereon to the Town Council, he reluctantly set aside as impossible, all idea of

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

preserving the fabric, and submitted instead a highly coloured drawing of the "rebuilt" Brig to be, showing a vividly blue river and sky. He declared the Brig to be "twisted from end to end and from side to side," a literal fact ; but, he also established as a premise, that the identity of the Brig must be preserved, and that identity he proposed to conserve by careful rebuilding, forgetting that the rent and shattered stones which he intended to take down and re-use, could only be preserved and strengthened *in situ*, and that any attempt to otherwise handle them, must of necessity be fatal,—a fact amply evidenced, when the actual work was undertaken.

At the Town Council meeting called to consider the reports, the Burgh Surveyor and Mr Eaglesham concurred with Mr Hall Blyth. I ventured to dissent, and obtained leave to record my dissent. I further submitted a statement, that to take down and rebuild the Brig was not to preserve its identity ; that, as an asset, the Brig was of priceless value to Ayr ; and that the impossible in engineering had not yet been reached. Admitting the utilitarian argument, I appealed for a higher, maintaining that each

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

individual member of the Town Council was the Trustee of a great national monument ; and, that until they had exhausted every effort for preservation, the ultimate and final responsibility for destruction must rest upon them. I begged that they would make one last effort, and not say to any engineer, "Is it worth preserving?" but, "Will you undertake the work, and give us a reasonable prospect of success?"

All the reports were submitted to Sir William Arrol, who endorsed Mr Hall Blyth's view, and the Town Council, definitely deciding upon rebuilding, invited my co-operation. Realising the nature of the work intended, I asked for certain assurances, which being refused, I also refused to take any responsibility for work of which I could not approve ; moreover, had I done so, my hands would have been tied. The Town Council having embarked upon rebuilding, before any reconsideration of the matter could reasonably be asked, it was essential that an authoritative plan of preservation should be forthcoming. I therefore again communicated with the Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings, who generously consulted Mr John Carruthers, an eminent

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

London engineer, and, from the notes which I sent from Ayr, an outline scheme showing that preservation was not impossible, was duly submitted to the Town Council in June 1905, by Mr Thackeray Turner. Although the preservation scheme so submitted was, by the Council, relegated to "lie on the table," its purpose had none the less been served, for Mr Turner's letter having appeared in the press report of the Council's proceedings, it reawakened public interest ; and Mr Oswald, the Convener of the County, being then fortunately in London, there saw the letter, and, having called upon Mr Turner, joined in the effort to preserve the Brig. He at once wrote to Provost Allan, asking that nothing be done to destroy the Brig till every effort for preservation had been exhausted ; and to me, generously offering to help in any possible way. Through Mr Oswald followed the memorable intervention of Lord Rosebery, whose letter at once gave a prominence to the whole endeavour, such as it had not before enjoyed.

The Town Council now declared its willingness to consider any reasonable schemes for preservation, and the whole question was thus once again opened up, with the result

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

that Mr Carruthers, on behalf of the London Society, visited the Brig and reported ; Mr Francis Fox also, because of his regard for old structures ; Mr John Strain, because of local interest ; Mr Alexander Simpson and Mr W. S. Wilson, the latter of whom ultimately carried out the work, besides many others. Meantime, certain of the Federated Burns Clubs were bestirring themselves, and indicating possible financial aid ; the annual meeting of the Burns Federation was at hand, and its President, ex-Provost M'Kay of Kilmarnock, kindly invited me to attend, and plead the cause of the Brig. At the meeting a Committee was appointed, and, in due course, a memorial was addressed to the Town Council. It was now gradually becoming evident that if, as a last resource, it should be necessary to appeal to the general public for the requisite funds, the response was likely to be generous ; but the feeling was also apparent and frankly expressed, that if public subscriptions became inevitable, then the greater portion of the required sum should be raised within the Royal Burgh itself, as it was the town of Ayr that, in a financial sense, would almost wholly benefit by the preservation of the Brig. Unfortunately, however,



## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

the contributions from the town of Ayr, proved, in amount, to be almost negligible; and it was from the many generous sympathisers, at home and abroad, that the money required eventually came.

Although schemes for preservation had now been formulated, the Town Council's plans for rebuilding were still in progress and well advanced; and the question of the Brig *versus* the bequest was not yet by any means settled. Something, however, had been gained, and the agitation had not been altogether barren; for the Town Council, because of the increasing interest manifested outwith the town in favour of preservation, became apparently more anxious to consider the desirability of preserving the Brig, as well as the bequest, and once again decided to submit the matter to Sir William Arrol; this time, for any observations he might see fit to make, upon the several preservative schemes now proposed.

Sir William's opinion was not made public, but it was in general circulation that the schemes submitted were not by him considered practicable; and, as the Town Council was reticent, it was arranged that specific questions be asked at the October Electoral



## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

Ward meetings, which questions elucidated, as was anticipated, that Sir William's objection was the old one—not that the schemes were impracticable, but, that the Brig was not worth preserving.

Mr Turner accordingly wrote a strong letter to *The Times*, and in the same month the Town Council intimated to Mr Oswald, Mr Turner, the Burns Federation, and myself that, in order to afford promoters of preservation an opportunity of providing the funds already indefinitely indicated, it would delay the commencement of rebuilding operations, for a period of four months. An informal Committee of those named was at once formed, ex-Provost M'Kay of Kilmarnock representing, from its head-quarters, the Federation ; and as it was necessary before appealing for public funds to make clear the position of the £10,000 held under the bequest, we asked a meeting with Provost Allan before formally communicating with the Town Council. As the outcome of several meetings, Mr Oswald and I had a final interview with the Provost and, with his concurrence, on the 11th November on behalf of the Committee, I addressed a memorandum to the Town Clerk, outlining a

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

scheme of compromise with the Heirs-at-Law, as a necessary preliminary to any public appeal for funds. This memorandum, after very considerable delay and some opposition, was submitted to Mr Clyde, K.C., the Solicitor-General, and to Mr Wm. Hunter, K.C., now Lord Hunter, and an Ayr man.

Meantime, in order to bring the Ayr Burns Club into line with the Federation, it was agreed to ask the Club to nominate a member to serve on the Voluntary Committee, and Mr Walter Neilson was accordingly appointed.

Although Counsel's opinion was not communicated to the Committee, it was generally understood to be not unfavourable to compromise, but the Town Clerk precluded any hope of compromise by formally intimating to me his instructions that, while his Council would be pleased to meet the members of the Voluntary Committee, it declined at the meeting, to allow any reference to, or discussion of the opinion of Counsel, an opinion which it had itself in Council agreed, at our request to ask.

After some hesitation to accept this veto, the Committee ultimately decided to meet with the Town Council; having first, however, drafted heads of proposals whereby to

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

counter the change of front, in the hope that these proposals might also form the basis of a possible agreement with the Town Council. These provided that the Town Council having ruled out any reference to or use of the bequest, then, in the event of the Committee successfully appealing to the public for £10,000, that the Brig be handed over to the Committee for preservative operations. Further, that as a temporary bridge would be necessary for the convenience of the public, it should be provided by the Town Council. The Town Council and the Committee accordingly met, and the foregoing proposals having been submitted to the Town Council, and, with one or two additional clauses, having been agreed to, they were adjusted by the Town Clerk and myself on the following day, signed by Mr Oswald for the Committee, and confirmed by the Town Council at its next statutory meeting. Why the Town Council finally granted that which it had previously so steadfastly refused, is a matter for interesting conjecture ; but whatever the motive, the way was at last clear for the effort of the Committee, to raise the £10,000 ; an effort which, from its commencement many declared to be absolutely

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

hopeless. These, however, were the fearful and unbelieving, who did not realise the strength, nor understand the living and enduring power of the mighty dead; nor were their eyes yet opened to the truth that a prophet is not without honour save in his own country, and in his own house.

The whole interest now revolved round the possibility of raising the required sum; and, through the kindness of a friend, widely experienced in the methods of appealing to and procuring money from a responsive and generous public, it was made possible for me to prepare a list of those from whom help might be expected, together with the approximate sums likely to be received.

It was accordingly decided that an effort be made to raise one half of the £10,000 privately; then to call a great public meeting, state that one half of the money was in hand, and ask the general public for the remaining £5000. The Voluntary Committee was now largely increased, and the list of possible private subscribers allocated; Mr Oswald readily undertaking the larger share, and working strenuously. At the next meeting he intimated two contributions of £500 each, one from Sir James Coats, the other from the

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

Marquess of Bute; and it is safe to say that, but for Mr Oswald's unremitting and enthusiastic efforts to raise the money, it might not have been forthcoming. So successful was he, that by the time of the public meeting addressed by Lord Rosebery at Ayr on the 26th September 1906, Mr Oswald was able to intimate that a sum of over £4,800 had been raised; and although he did not say so, it was raised mainly by himself.

Lord Rosebery's speech is historic in Burns Annals. As his letter to Mr Oswald had first raised the Brig controversy to its true altitude, so his great speech at Ayr thrilled the Burns world. Its devotees had not looked to their High Priest in vain, and Lord Rosebery voiced for them their better aspirations and desires. It was the first of a trilogy; the second followed at Edinburgh; the third at Glasgow,\* the occasion being the inauguration of the Lord Provost's Fund, a fund mainly due to the initiation of Dr William Wallace, then Editor of the *Glasgow Herald*. The *Daily Record and Mail*, the *Glasgow Evening News*, the Ayr newspapers and many others, opened their columns for subscriptions. The Town Council of Ayr

\* Appendix C.



## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

declined to subscribe ; several, however, of its members did so as private individuals, but the Provost, and others, absented themselves from Lord Rosebery's meeting, although it was an important public meeting, called for the furtherance of the Town's interest, and the conservation of its good name. None the less Scottish and St Andrews Societies, abroad and at home, readily helped, the name of Robert Burns was magical, and early in the following year the Executive Committee was able to intimate to the Town Council, that the required £10,000 had been raised, and that it was prepared to proceed with the work, in terms of the agreement.

In May 1907 work was commenced upon the Brig, Mr Wilson being in charge of the engineering work ; and, as I knew the Brig well, I was asked to associate myself with Mr Wilson and undertake the Archæological work, leaving all questions affecting stability entirely in his hands. Acceptance, of course, involved retiral from the vice-chairmanship of the Executive Committee, as also from the Committee itself. Mr Wilson entered upon the enterprise with a very wide experience of underpinning, and he understood to the full the delicate and arduous



## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

nature of the preservative work before him. As it turned out, the Brig was even more insecure than had at first been supposed, and the marvel is that the old structure held together so long. Its tenacity and dourness have indeed been great, and the Brig now enjoys its well-earned reward.

Fortunately, this structural work was not let out to contract, but experienced men were employed under Mr Mitchell, an excellent engineer foreman ; and as from time to time the peculiar nature of the work to be done developed, so it was treated.

Beneath the Brig is a bed of brown boulder clay, from a few inches, to 10 feet in thickness, with a southward dip across the river. Below this boulder clay is a thick bed of light fireclay, and, near the surface, gravel. The south abutment, and its complementary pier, are founded upon the boulder clay, the north abutment upon fireclay almost solidified into rock, thickly interspersed with fossils, and divided by several thin coal seams, from which good coal was often taken, for use at the Brig. The increased river scour, consequent upon harbour dredging lower down the river, had undermined, if not the piers themselves, then at least in places their fen-

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

ders, to the extent of in one portion 6 feet inward. The greatest water-flow is beneath the south arch, where the bed of the river, at the beginning of operations, was from 4 to 8 feet below the level of the oak cradle foundations of the piers. These oak cradles were formed of roughly hewn timbers, in part squarely dressed, half checked at the cross angles, scarfed at the longitudinal junctions, and pinned together by a number of 1-inch oak pins, securely driven home. The timbers varied from 4 to 5 inches, to 8 to 10 inches square. The heaviest followed the outline of the piers and cutwaters, and were held together by lighter cross-pieces, these again, beneath the junction of the piers and cutwaters, being stiffened by angle struts. This oak cradle framing had been set upon the boulder clay, which again had been cut into, or the cradle wedged up from it, with oak wedges to a level surface, and upon the timbers large irregular flat stones laid. The spaces between these stones, as also between the cradling timbers, had been filled in with loose stones and whin boulders, of varying sizes ; and, as the piers rose, the hearts inside the heavy dressed stone facing would seem to have been similarly filled in, and

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

the interstices packed with lime run in hot. Where this lime was free from damp and decay, it was found to be as hard as the stone itself. Part of the difficulty of preservation, lay in the fact that the joints of the stone facing not having been kept tightly pointed, water had found its way in, and that in time, aggravated by the suction of the falling tides, had rotted or torn away the lime from the heart of the piers. The cavities thus left behind the facing stones, extended into the piers from 1 to 6 feet, and upward to high-water mark ; moreover, these cavities became in time solidly packed with a fine deposit of river mud. So hollow were the piers in places immediately above high-water mark that, while refacing one of the cutwaters, I could on either side of a removed stone freely insert a footrule 3 feet in one direction, and in the other, to the extent of my arm from the elbow, with in addition the full length of the 3-feet rod. Each of the three piers had been often refaced, but none had sunk very materially, although the northmost pier had moved at one end nearly 10 inches laterally at its base, while the cutwater of another had sunk several inches at its outer extremity, but in



THE AULD BRIG FROM THE NORTH-EAST AFTER PRESERVATIVE  
OPERATIONS



## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

its lower courses only. The arches, however, had suffered sorely by rain soaking in between the roadway cobbles, and this soaking, had gradually wasted or washed out the lime from between the stones forming the arches, especially towards the crown, and these stones closing together in consequence, had in two of the arches torn them, with their spandrels, away from the cutwaters, as much as 5 inches at the top, decreasing downwards towards the springing. The outer ring of voussoirs, was consequently in some places badly fractured because of unequal pressure, and the soffits of many of the stones throughout the arches were splintered seriously. The spandrel walls near the top, and the parapets immediately above, seem to have been renewed frequently, and I am inclined to believe that some of the stones of the existing parapet, were those taken from the fallen north arch, which, with part of the northmost land abutment, collapsed, as already stated, in 1735. In the Minutes of the Town Council, there do not appear to be any references to the removal of the arched gateway of the Brig, shown in Slezer's view of 1693 ; but, from the appearance of the north-west abutment wall, and from the



## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

facts disclosed during the excavations at the gateway site, I am strongly inclined to the opinion, that it was, in at least large part, carried away by the fall of the northmost arch and its immediate landward abutment.

The Brig proper consists of four beautifully shaped segmental arches, each from 52 to 53 feet span, three massive piers of 15 feet in thickness, with triangular cutwaters and heavy land abutments. It rises 27 feet above high-water mark, and the tide fall is 9 feet. The width of the Brig footway averages 12 feet between the parapets, and the steeply sloping roadways, that at the south end between houses, gives the Brig and approaches an approximate length of over 500 feet; but the Brig proper between the abutments is 255 feet long. About the Brig there is nothing mechanical, either in the setting-out of the work, or in the building; and it has all that indescribable charm of humanness which is the distinctive feature of all old work. For instance, no two arches or cutwaters are exactly similar, and the northmost arch, the last built, is 2 feet less in height than the others. None of the arches spring too accurately from the piers, and there is that delightful honesty of procedure manifested through-





THE HEART OF THE BRIG, SHOWING THE CONCRETE  
SHAFT-HEAD AND CENTRAL SPANDREL WALL

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

out the work, showing so frankly that where a pier and its lower arch stones had been built 4 inches over much to one side, and the variation discovered, the builders accepted the fact, and laid the next arch course 4 inches back and into the true line. The very spur-stones of the pier bases vary, and one of them has on its upper surface a large incised heart. Let those sympathetically conversant with the unaffected working of the human mind in old buildings, conjecture its why !

This, then, is the Brig we set out to handle, the goal being to so preserve it, with all its curves and twists and settlements, that when the work should be completed few might know it had been touched at all ; and moreover, we desired that each separate movement of the fabric might be preserved, and clearly shown on its face.

And now a word about the distorted, and much criticised south arch. The resolution of the public meeting instructed " that all work falling to be done shall have for its object the preservation of the existing fabric, as far as possible, in its entirety, and shall interfere as little as possible with its outward appearance, construction, or form." The south arch, therefore, was retained, because

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

the Engineer was able to make it as secure and strong in its existing shape, as it would have been had it been taken down and rebuilt. Further, had it been taken down, it is safe to say that not 10 per cent. of its stones could possibly have been re-used.

Mr Wilson early recognised the possibilities of the heavy piers and cutwaters, and at once proceeded to utilise them ; but before pitting through their middle, he required first to ensure the stability of the arches, and to that end the outer joints of the spandrel wall-stones had to be securely and deeply pointed with pure cement, to resist the great after pressure of forced grouting from within. In so pointing, I added to the cement a little fine gravel, keeping the cement well back from the face of each weather-beaten stone, and bedding small pieces of old slate in the more open joints, closely following in this—as in all else—the original work. Moreover, in pointing, each separate stone or slate bedding-in was separately pointed all round, in order that the weather-beaten surface texture of the Brig might, as far as possible, be preserved. The outer casing of the Brig having now been made secure against the pressure of the cement grout to be pumped



## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

into the fabric from within, Mr Wilson proceeded with the treatment of the Brig, arch by arch and pier by pier successively, beginning at the south end. He first cut trenches 3 feet wide across the roadway, immediately above the south abutment and its complementary pier ; these trenches were cut through the sand filling-in of the arch haunches and piers, strongly bratticed as they were sunk, carried downward to the solid masonry of the piers, and filled with concrete.

Thereafter, the sand between the old outer spandrel walls was removed, the interstices between the rough upper faces of the arch stones carefully cleaned out and filled in with cement, and a 9-inch concrete covering laid over all. Following this work, a longitudinal central spandrel wall 2 feet 6 inches in thickness was built of concrete on, and along the centre line of each arch. The inner joints of the outer spandrel walls having been also picked out, were grouted with pure cement under air-pressure of from 20 to 30 lbs. per square inch. At a much later period in the operations, concrete jack-arches were carried from the side to the centre spandrel walls, thus forming a continuous concrete under-roadway, upon which was spread



## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

a specially prepared impervious coating of rock-building composition, to within 1 inch of the outer edge of the parapet walls ; and, upon this coating, a layer of sand, in which the roadway granite setts were laid.

The Brig was now ready for the more dangerous work of underpinning. From between the 3-feet transverse concrete walls already sunk above the piers, and carried down to their solid stonework, the sand hearting was removed, and the old external walls grouted under pressure ; thereafter, an 8 by 4 feet shaft was sunk through the stone heart of each pier, and downward through the clay, 9 feet below the oak cradles. A 12-inch concrete floor was laid, a powerful electric motor centrifugal pump brought into operation, and the mining beneath the piers to their outward faces commenced. As these mines, each roughly about 3 feet wide, were foot by foot driven, they were strongly timbered, and cement grout forced upward through the temporary boarded roof into the old foundations, which sometimes fell out like a ruckle of old stones into the mine ; in the more dilapidated piers, sometimes from as much as 2 to 3 feet above the oak cradling, which cradling it was unfortunately found

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

necessary to largely cut away. The underpinning of blue brick in cement was then built upon a concrete foundation, and in the brickwork several 2-inch iron pipes were laid for dealing more easily with seeping water, but also because through these pipes cement grout could afterwards be forced into the interior of the brick underpinning. As the temporary timber roofs were reached they were removed, and against the smooth face of the cement grout previously forced in, the brick underpinning was wedged up, and grouted solid, under high pressure. This procedure was afterwards successively and successfully carried out in each of the twenty mines or underpinning sections of each pier, and the corresponding twelve sections of the abutments. It reflects the greatest credit upon the Engineer, his foreman and workers, that there was no subsidence of the structure, not even a single crack in the outer superstructure ; nay, more, not one of the original cracks in the external stonework opened by a fraction, save at one point in the east cutwater of the north pier, where it was infinitesimal ; and it is to be remembered that in this pier there was one large old rent 5 inches wide, and also, that into a cavity of

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

the pier one could work one's whole arm, up to the elbow. As an instance of one of the many difficulties incidental to the carrying out of the work, from one mine in the south pier the sinkers were driven out for nearly three continuous weeks by the inrush of water, which at full tide was very great ; and even at low water the mine was nearly always full. In several of the mines, looking from within, one could at low water see between the Brig cradle and the boulder clay the blue sky of heaven, so much of the river bed had been washed away from the pier foundations, and it was literally inch by inch that way was made by damming out the water till the underpinning had been completed. Often, day after day, at low water, when the river and weather permitted, and as one of many expedients, 2-inch boards overlapping, or as sheaths, were driven into the river bed outside the piers, and the space between packed with clay, or grouted with cement; sometimes cement in bags was packed round, and usually, as one hole was stopped, another developed. Patience, resource, and deliberation in the end prevailed, but there was none the less many an anxious hour for those in charge, and too much credit cannot





THE BRIG ROADWAY AFTER PRESERVATIVE OPERATIONS



## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

be given to Mr Wilson, and all who worked under him.

In May 1909, the engineering operations were sufficiently advanced to permit a serious beginning with the archæological work. The masonry of each of the three piers, from the splayed stone base upward to nearly the corbel springer of the arches, had been at various times refaced with stone or brickwork. It was mainly patchwork, and the regular courses of the original work had been wholly ignored. Moreover, many of the later facing stones had not been properly bonded into the masonry of the piers. The west nose of the south cutwater had, in its lower courses, sunk about 5 inches, and the space between the oversailing upper courses which had remained in position, filled in with stone patching and Roman cement. Upon removing the fractured stones, a deposit of fine river mud was seen to penetrate for a distance of 2 or 3 feet inward, in one pier as much as 6 feet, and this mud deposit with the rotted lime had effectually checked the flow of cement grout, driven under pressure, from within the piers. Structurally, therefore, it was necessary to clear away all such mud, rotted lime, and fractured facing-stones wher-



## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

ever found ; and as the latter were almost wholly new, and practically only patchwork, they were archæologically valueless. After rebuilding with brick and cement, outward from the solid portion of the piers to the new stone facings, which were built on the original lines, and using therein any old stones found, the whole was grouted with cement under high pressure ; and in order to follow and ascertain the rise and movement of the cement within the piers, open joints were left between certain of the facing-stones, and closed as the cement rose. When the cement had sufficiently consolidated, fresh grout at full pressure was forced in, to make up any space lost by consolidation, also to wedge hard against all upper work, and solidly fill in all open spaces. After the piers, the abutments were similarly treated.

The fractured portions of the outer ring of voussoirs were then cut out, from never less than 9 inches to the extent of fracture, and new stones of identical size were inserted and clamped to the old by lead dowels run into the intersections; a V channel was also cut along the top of the stones, through which channel liquid cement was pumped in, thus solidly binding all new and old work to-

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

gether. The spandrel walls, where loosened from their backing, were treated in a somewhat similar fashion. When, within comparatively recent years, the roadway level was altered, and straightened from the old curvatures caused by the movement of the arches, the original side gutter channeling was then also broken off, or torn out from beneath the parapet ; thus materially decreasing its stability. The joints were badly worn, and so seriously decayed, that at the Ayr end the east parapet overhung outward nearly 9 inches. The footings and walls therefore, required rebuilding, so the old side guttering and gargoyles were renewed, and the parapets carefully taken down in short lengths and rebuilt against standardised rods, to their old lateral curvature. A 2-inch joggle channel was cut in the beds and joints of each old stone, and grouted with cement, and all possible old stones were re-used. Where old stones were very much worn away, the joints were bedded in with hard red tiles pointed with cement, so that the old work might be readily distinguishable from the new; but the pointing was done differently from that of the outside walls, because weatherworn joints were here forbidden,

## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

and the wall surfaces had to be kept as even as possible. For this reason all cement joints were made V-shaped, the apex being of course outward. Unfortunately, from an archæological standpoint, cobble-stones were prohibited in the roadway, but small rough granite setts, with wide joints, were used, in order to repeat as far as possible the texture and scale of the parapet walls; upon which were placed five wrought-iron lamp standards, made in the same fashion as the one old lamp, also replaced in position. The excavations at the north end of the Brig, disclosed an early roadway of cobble-stones and roughly-built guttering, from 12 to 18 inches lower than the present roadway, and with a more steeply inclined slope. The lower walls of the old triangular toll- or guard-house, were also exposed; and it may be noted that this chamber, with its deep foundation walls all the way up, was built against, and not with, the earlier abutment wall of the Brig. The east foundation of the arched gateway was followed downward for over 10 feet, without reaching its bottom, but the corresponding west foundation had altogether disappeared. All these remaining portions of old

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

work have been carefully preserved, exactly as found ; and, for their better protection, enclosed by an iron railing. In the Brig parapets have been retained the square holes in the wall stones and copes, wherein rested the later toll-beams or barriers. As little as possible of the original work of the Brig has been touched, and any new work, or insertions essential for its maintenance, have followed as closely as modern work may, the lines of the old. Several masons' marks were found, and of each a careful impression was taken, and the results afterwards tabulated.

It was difficult at first to break the masons, working on the Brig, from these characteristics of modern work, impersonally hewn stones, and mechanically plumb and level building. The old curves and twists of the Brig soon, however, made their power felt, and the workmen gradually found that there was more beauty in the old slightly cambered and full line, than in the one absolutely straight, from start to finish. Taken all round, they were an excellent lot of men ; and when once they realised that preservative operations cannot be pushed or worked out as is a contract job, they settled down to the order of things wherein craftsmen, and



## THE BRIG OF AYR AND

not merely operatives, are required ; very many taking a deep interest in the proceedings.

Now that the work is completely finished, the retrospect is not unsatisfactory, although there is little doubt, that, in the town of Ayr, the preservation of the Brig does not commend itself to many. In origin and essence it is based largely upon sentiment; upon historic reverence, and archæological regard.

It did not, and does not, appeal to utilitarian instincts ; and whatever of material value it may hold, belongs of necessity to other generations, when men shall more clearly see, and understand also, its intrinsic worth.

But for one or two staunch friends of the Brig in the Town Council, the work, at least in its initial stages, would probably never have been carried through; and in Mr J. B. Ferguson of Balgarth, then a Councillor, the Brig found a warm and fitting friend, for his interests are largely centred in Alloway, and his home for long Doonholm, where William Burness worked as gardener; and, on near land was built the "Auld Clay Biggin'," wherein the poet was born. Then, was not the first man who ever offered me local help and en-

## SOMETHING OF ITS STORY

couragement in the earliest days of the endeavour, when help was sorely needed, also of an old Ayrshire family, the representative and lineal descendant of one whom Scotsmen must ever revere ; the Patriot who held for Scotland her freedom, who first gave to her consciousness of national life, who won the Battle of Stirling Bridge, and burnt the Barns of Ayr? Mr H. R. Wallace of Busby, stood strongly for the Brig, from the very first day ; and at the very outset of the enterprise, long before subscriptions were even thought of, he, possibly foreseeing the ultimate necessity, generously offered a contribution of £25 should it be required.

Living on the Brig practically at all hours, and in all weathers, wondering over and dreaming of it often, the thought ever uppermost in my mind was, What did the shade of Robert Burns think of it all? I recalled his marvellous insight into the human mind, his terrible perceptive power shredding act from motive, his trenchant words, his humour and generous thoughts; and, I wondered what he would say to the workers on the Brig, to his fellow-townsmen, to the Brig Committee and to its Chairman, so unsparing of himself; but most of



## T H E   B R I G   O F   A Y R

all to the Knight of Dalmeny? I could imagine the two men meeting on the crown of the Brig causeway, gripping hands, and looking deep into each other's eyes. What would they see, and what say! They are both men—and one something over.

THE Auld Brig of Ayr was reopened by the Right Honourable the Earl of Rosebery, K.G., K.T., on the 29th of July 1910. At the Brig the Provost of Ayr said, "Ayr has been given the sobriquet of 'The Auld Toon.' She would have forfeited her right to such a title had she allowed her Auld Brig to be demolished. We love the Auld Brig for itself as well as for its associations. We must protect and preserve those relics of the long-past ages, as there are sermons in Art as well as in Nature. Sentiment must not always be swept aside by utility. It is important that the future may read the records of the past. We are here to-day to congratulate ourselves on having successfully negotiated the last fence in connection with the Auld Brig, this 'ghaist alluring edifice' as Burns has called it, 'whose wrinkled arches' we can see to-day have been maintained, partly by preserving, partly by restoring, and partly by rebuilding. The preserving and restoring have been done at the expense of a very widely scattered company of loyal Scotsmen and admirers of our national bard, who look upon this Brig as the finest monument we have to his memory."

Lord Rosebery briefly replied, "I congratulate Ayr not merely on a great restoration, but on the prevention of a great desecration. It was with incredulity and with horror that the great mass of Burns worshippers throughout the world heard that there was any idea under any circumstances of tampering with this immemorial bridge. For-

## A P P E N D I X A

tunately, owing to the enterprise and energy mainly of Mr Oswald and Mr Morris, that desecration has been averted, and I think we may hope and believe that as long as the poet's works live, so long will the Auld Brig of Ayr stand as a testimony to him for ever."

At the Town Hall, and immediately following the reopening ceremony at the Brig, the Freedom of the Burgh was presented to Lord Rosebery and Mr Oswald. In the course of his speech his Lordship, in commenting upon the intolerance of the Church of Burns' day, said, "His," Burns', "great horror was of anything which savoured of hypocrisy and cant, but what he had mainly in his mind then was religious hypocrisy and religious cant. Cant survives, though religious hypocrisy and cant are but little in fashion now. They do not pay as they did then. But are we quite sure that in avoiding one kind of cant we are absolutely free from any other? Are we absolutely certain that our characters in these days are as free from cant as Burns wished them to be? There are a thousand forms of cant which form the dry rot of our country. It is not my task to-day to point them out. I might introduce division where I only wish to leave a united Ayr behind me. I do ask you, ladies and gentlemen, to apply yourselves the touchstone of Burns' diatribes against cant, and I prophesy for you that you will find yourselves none the worse for it. Now, Mr Provost, I must apologise for having detained you so long, but when one is given the freedom of Ayr one cannot but touch upon Burns, and when one touches

## A P P E N D I X A

upon Burns one cannot well check oneself. As I have said before, I am quite aware that you are only giving us this freedom to-day because we are living admirers of Burns, and because you cannot give it to the dead man himself. To speak the honest truth, Burns never seems dead to me. Of all dead men he is the most living to me, much more living than many men who to-day are alive. I know no man who has impressed his individuality and his vitality so strongly on his fellow-creatures as this man who was born here 150 years ago. His blood still courses warm and strong through the veins of Scotland. His spirit is abroad in all our country, and from our country it has passed over the world ; but its home, its original source, its favourite region is this county of Ayr, and I trust that in the long days to come, when people remember with shame and almost with terror there was once a risk of the Old Brig being demolished, they will also remember in turn their responsibility, that the connection between Burns and Ayr is indissoluble and eternal."

On the afternoon of the day of the reopening, the Town Council caused to be placed on the parapet of the Brig a bronze tablet with this inscription:—

THE AULD BRIG OF AYR  
ERECTED IN THE 13TH CENTURY  
PRESERVATION WORK 1907-10  
REOPENED BY LORD ROSEBERY

29TH JULY 1910

JAMES S. HUNTER  
PROVOST OF THE BURGH OF AYR

## A P P E N D I X A

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The Preservation Committee on the 9th June 1911 placed another bronze tablet by its side, which records—

IN ADMIRATION OF  
ROBERT BURNS  
AND HIS IMMORTAL POEM  
THE BRIGS OF AYR  
THIS BRIG WAS DURING 1907-10  
RESTORED BY SUBSCRIPTIONS  
RECEIVED FROM ALL PARTS  
OF THE WORLD

R. A. OSWALD, CHAIRMAN OF  
THE PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

It is unfortunate that neither of the tablets are quite happily phrased, for while the one might readily convey to future generations that the work of preservation had been carried out by the Town Council; the other might also, and without hypercriticism, be held to imply that those who worked for or gave of their means toward the preservation of the Brig, were actuated merely by "admiration" of the poet, rather than by the deeper and more enduring sentiments of reverence and veneration. The noun implies less than the truth, and the inscription fails to recognise, or altogether ignores the devotion and even love which many of those who shared in the enterprise, bear in their heart for Robert Burns.



THIS tradition has survived in at least two forms. The first, that the lover was a knight, drowned while crossing the river to the Ayr side ; the second, that the sisters were enamoured of two monks from one of the Ayr monasteries, who, in fording the river from the Ayr side to the Castle of the New Town, met the same untoward fate. As indicating the pertinacity with which tradition survives, an old man recently told me he remembered the arched gateway of Newton Castle, through which, he stated it had long been said, these monks commonly passed.

Except as very vague and now almost forgotten traditions, these, as many of the uncertain happenings of the past, are rarely reliable in detail, although in circumstance often indisputable. In this case the second story is the more unlikely, not in practice but in sequence, for while the earliest known reference to the Brig is in 1236, it does not follow that the Brig was only then built ; and one must not forget that the first of the two larger monasteries on the Ayr bank, that of the Dominican or Black Friars, was built but six years prior to the date named. Whether, then, it was a lover or lovers who essayed to ford the river, and whether soldier or priest, is of little moment to-day. The human element is always



## A P P E N D I X B

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as ever the essential factor and real interest, and the music of the song that remains clear and dominant centres round the circumstance that a devoted lover was by the river bereft of life, and in this tradition, or legend or tale, a tale as old as man and belonging to all ages, the Brig found its reputed origin and being.

## A P P E N D I X C

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THE following postscript from a letter which I received from Lord Rosebery a few weeks ago, is of interest psychologically as evidence, if not of fact, then at least of the power which sincerity and eloquence may exert upon a sympathetic and perhaps imaginative mind.

“*P.S.*—Since writing the above, I have been looking at the book, and a recollection comes across me that may be of interest to you.

“After my speech at Glasgow for the Brig of Ayr, I received a letter from a stranger saying that he had been present at the meeting with his son, and that while I had been speaking he had distinctly seen the form of Robert Burns standing behind me, or walking in behind me as I was speaking, as I described him in my speech.

“I do not know who the man was, and give the story for what it is worth, but I think it is interesting.”

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